

B2 16. (Amended) The process according to claim 24, wherein said monomer or monomers are based on acrylic acid, methacrylic acid or derivatives thereof.

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18. (Amended) The process of claim 24, wherein said comonomer is vinyl acetate.

19. (Amended) The process according to claim 24, wherein at least one crosslinker based on a bi- or polyfunctional monomer is used in addition to said monomer or monomers.

B3 20. (Amended) The process according to claim 24, wherein said heating is carried out at a temperature of from 140 to 180°C.

21. (Amended) The process according to claim 24, wherein said polymer products have a content of residual monomer of less than 50 ppm.

22. (Amended) The process according to claim 24, wherein said polymer products have a content of residual monomer of less than 30 ppm.

23. (Amended) The process according to claim 24, wherein said polymer products have a residual content of acrylamide of less than 10 ppm.--

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Please add the following new claims:

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B4 --24. (New) A process for producing a water-soluble or water-swellaable polymer or copolymer comprising, providing an acid monomer or monomers alone, or with a comonomer or comonomers; partially or completely neutralizing said monomer or monomers with a basic nitrogen compound or compounds; free-radical polymerizing said monomer or monomers alone, or with comonomer or comonomers to form said water-soluble or water-swellaable polymer or copolymer; and subsequently heating said water-soluble or water-swellaable polymer or copolymer at a temperature of from 120 to 240°C.

25. (New) The process according to claim 24, wherein said nitrogen compound is selected from the group consisting of ammonia, ammonium hydroxide, aliphatic mono- and polyamines, cycloaliphatic mono- and polyamines, aromatic mono- and polyamines, heterocyclic amines, hydroxylamine and alkanolamines.